



## BOOK REVIEW

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TITLE: *Death and the Rest of Our Life*

AUTHOR: Father John Garvey

Father John, our parish's second priest, is a full-time author, editor, and columnist for *Commonweal* magazine. In *Death and the Rest of Our Life*, he shares his thoughts on what it means to face death from an Orthodox Christian perspective. It is sprinkled with Father John's personal anecdotes, which seem to transport you immediately next to him as if in direct conversation. Similar to Father John's sermons, his book is rich with references to Eastern and Western Christian theology, the Holy Scriptures, Hinduism, Buddhism, philosophy, literature, and poetry. At eighty-eight pages, this book is a quick but thought-provoking meditation on a topic that is always relevant.

The reader may be familiar with the subject of death as many have experienced the loss of a loved one. Father John helps us to understand death and ultimately, our own hope of resurrection, in the context of Holy Scripture and Orthodox Christian theology, as well as the deaths of his father and other loved ones. The goal of understanding death is to gain the ability to lead "fuller, more profound and even joyful lives". The ancient Fathers instructed their followers to contemplate their own deaths on a daily basis. This should not lead us to become morose and depressed. Instead, we must face the reality that we, and all humanity, cannot escape the reality of death. Our ultimate hope lies in Christ. He did not avoid death; rather His obedience and self-emptying led Him to death on the Cross. Although we hold certain stories and ideas to console us, our fate after death is a mystery. Father John argues how you approach this mystery "will form not only your opinion about death but also the ways in which you approach the rest of your life". Unwillingness to confront death leads to fear and selfishness. A true understanding of death will allow us to put aside our idols and illusions of false security, and lead us to the path of love and compassion for our neighbor and thanksgiving to God.

Father John also untangles the wrong influence of Neoplatonism. Christianity believes that body and soul form an integrated person; the body is not the prison of the soul as Neoplatonists believe. Death that leads to the separation of body and soul is the result of the Fall, as Father John quotes Saint Paul and Father Alexander Schmemmann. Resurrection - the reintegration of the soul into a glorified body in the age to come - is the true Scriptural concept of eternal life. The idea that the soul has some immortal quality apart from the love and grace of God is not Christian. Hope in the victory already won by Christ - what we celebrate and hope for in the Eucharist - should sustain us to await the Lord's Coming and our own resurrection.

**Reviewed by Mark and Nancy Vassilakis**

*Dear Parishioners, if you would like to share with us a book you have read from the parish library, please fill out a "review form" which can be found downstairs in the library.*